

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

161042Z Aug 05

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 07 TEL AVIV 005054

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM  
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD  
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL  
PARIS ALSO FOR POL  
ROME FOR MFO  
E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [IS](#) [KMDR](#) [MEDIA](#) [REACTION](#) [REPORT](#)  
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

-----  
SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
-----

- [1](#). Gaza and Northern West Bank Disengagement
- [2](#). Iraq

-----  
Key stories in the media:  
-----

Last night, the electronic media aired Sharon's brief speech to the nation regarding the disengagement. He said that while he had hoped Israel could keep the Gaza settlements forever, reality simply intervened. Sharon said that the burden of proof lay with the Palestinians: "The world awaits the Palestinian response -- a hand offered in peace or continued terrorist fire. To a hand offered in peace, we will respond with an olive branch. But if they choose fire, we will respond with fire, more severe than ever." Sharon outlined social benefits Israelis would enjoy from the move.

All media extensively reported on the emotion-laden, relatively peaceful first day of disengagement, as the TV stations devoted large swathes of their daily programs to reports from the Gaza Strip. Maariv front-paged a personal report from Elei Sinai (northern Gaza Strip) by its reporter Eli Bohadana, himself a resident of the settlement. Hatzofe banners: "Gush Katif Is Crying." Ha'aretz reported that the IDF has set a goal to finish evacuating the Gaza Strip within 10 days, despite the fact that the thousands of people who infiltrated the settlements in recent weeks "are already escalating beyond what the residents themselves deem appropriate." Leading media reported that half of the Gush Katif families are expected to leave by Wednesday.

Israel Radio quoted Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz as saying during a press conference this morning that law and order will be strictly enforced in the settlements slated for evacuation, and that law-breakers will be punished. Mofaz also said that the Palestinians should not celebrate at this time, because the army will only leave the Strip in a month, a fact of which they have been informed but that they have apparently chosen to ignore. Israel Radio quoted Mofaz as saying that the defense establishment will decide tonight which settlements will be the first ones to be evacuated forcibly on Wednesday. The radio reported that physical scuffles between protesters, many of whom are staying illegally in the Gaza Strip, and police began this morning at the settlement of Neve Dekalim.

Israel Radio reported that, after the completion of the disengagement, the U.S. administration will dispatch appraisers to Israel to determine the amount of aid the U.S. will allot to Galilee and Negev development. The station quoted a State Department spokesman as saying Monday that Israel and the Palestinians need to coordinate the withdrawal from Gaza. The radio said that the spokesman stressed that the Palestinians have an obligation to ensure that the withdrawal takes place in an atmosphere of calm. Israel Radio notes that over the past 24 hours, the disengagement has replaced Iraq as the lead story in all American media.

Leading media quoted Shaul Mofaz as saying in an interview with Al Jazeera-TV that Israel will not cede the large settlement blocs in the West Bank.

Abu Obeideh (phon.), the spokesman of Hamas's military wing in the Gaza Strip, was quoted as saying in an interview with Maariv that Israel emerged humiliated from its pullout. Abu Obeideh said that Hamas would continue its struggle and that Ashkelon and Sderot residents should continue to be afraid.

Major media reported that on Sunday night, unidentified gunmen kidnapped a French journalist who was in the Gaza Strip to cover the disengagement. Jerusalem Post writes that the abduction prompted some foreign TV crews to leave the area in fear for their lives.

Citing AP, Ha'aretz quoted UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's spokesman Stephane Dujarric as saying that the sponsors of the road map will meet in mid-September to assess Israel's disengagement from Gaza and the northern West Bank.

Jerusalem Post quoted Jim Baxendell, a spokesman for the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) as saying in Cairo that a vehicle from the MFO unit based near the Gaza Strip in the Sinai set off an explosive device that destroyed it and slightly wounded two peace keepers on Monday.

Several media cited the Qatari newspaper Al-Rayah as saying that, according to Mauritanian sources, a delegation of representatives of the junta that overthrew the regime in Mauritania early this month secretly visited Israel last week.

SIPDIS

-----  
[1](#)1. Gaza and Northern West Bank Disengagement:  
-----

Summary:  
-----

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "[Last night's address] was the speech of [Sharon's] life, the decisive evening in his turbulent career, the blast off to a complex operation he had planned and organized for two years."

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach opined in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "[In his speech to the nation, Sharon demonstrated] no sense of how to truly lead such a controversial move.... All the citizens of Israel, supporters and opponents, deserved better."

Ha'aretz editorialized: "After decades of occupation and exploitation, Israel has an obligation to be at the forefront of giving assistance to rehabilitate Gaza and ensuring the Palestinians' prosperity."

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "It will take the concerted effort of Israel and the international community ... to ensure that the Israeli pain and sacrifice we are seeing today are not for naught and that Palestinian celebrations are not harbingers of a new round of belligerency."

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized: "There can be no doubt: this warrior hero has erased his past with a single stroke and will be recorded in all his notoriety in the history of the Jewish people."

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in Jerusalem Post: "The main problem is not that the radicals, who enjoy about 80 percent support, will take over, rather that they will easily block diplomatic progress and maintain the terror war against Israel, damaging their own people more than their enemy."

Block Quotes:  
-----

[1](#)I. "The Speech of His Life"

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (August 16): "[Last night's address] was the speech of [Sharon's] life, the decisive evening in his turbulent career, the blast off to a complex operation he had planned and organized for two years.... He wanted to convey a number of messages. His disillusionment over the hope that Israel could hold onto Netzarim and Kfar Darom 'forever,' and the recognition of the 'changing reality' that drove him to the disengagement. He had chosen a unilateral move because of the Palestinians' obstinacy. He demanded

that the Palestinians fight terror as a condition to resuming negotiations.... He spoke of yearning for inner unity and mutual respect rather than 'hostility among brethren' and hatred. There was also a reminder of the coming elections.... On Channel 2-TV, Sharon's rival, Binyamin Netanyahu, warned of the terrorism expected after the pullout, and presented his opposing platform: a demand for reciprocity and keeping security matters in Israel's hands, adding 'Don't give them a port.' Sharon's aides commented that Netanyahu voted for the disengagement four times, and was partner to the decision to build the port in February. Sharon displayed understanding for the suffering of the Palestinians crowded in the refugee camps in Gaza 'in greenhouses of growing hatred.'

## II. "We Deserve Better"

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach opined in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yedioth Aharonot (August 16): "The speech the Prime Minister made last night made one thing abundantly clear: just how crazy was the settlement enterprise, which Sharon himself headed for two decades, how delusional and how dangerous. The few and unconvincing explanations that Sharon gave for his ostensible turnabout -- from the man who called for 'settling every hilltop' and who thought up the most far-reaching settlement schemes -- to the man who ordered uprooting thousands of Jews from their home without an agreement -- only made it clear how little thought was behind the entire business in the first place.... You cannot help but sense that Sharon interprets the word 'leadership' according to the single criterion of 'I want, therefore I do.' He has no sense of how to truly lead such a controversial move, and how to minimize (since canceling is impossible) the difficult implications for the day after.... It looked as if the speech ... was made mainly because Sharon was told that he had to make it. Like the entire move that Sharon led up until disengagement, which was mainly an impressive political step in its own right and very little of it was actually preparing people mentally, it was much more of a statement of imperiousness than an act of persuasion.... All the citizens of Israel, supporters and opponents, deserved better."

## III. "Partners in Unilateralism"

Ha'aretz editorialized (August 16): "Without negotiations -- which have instead been called 'coordination' -- with the Palestinian Authority's leadership, without the determination of PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) ... and without the intensive involvement of Egypt ... the disengagement would look completely different. It is also impossible not to be impressed by the enormous contribution of James Wolfensohn, the Quartet's envoy, who advanced key issues... After decades of occupation and exploitation, Israel has an obligation to be at the forefront of giving assistance to rehabilitate Gaza and ensuring the Palestinians' prosperity. Realizing the dream of its old-new neighbors is to a large extent also in Israel's interest. And the Palestinian leadership, for its part, is facing an enormous challenge, because what is needed is not only an improved standard of living, but also construction of a security, economic and political model that, alongside the benefits it will bring to residents of Gaza, will also tranquilize Israeli fears about additional diplomatic moves in the West Bank. Abu Mazen, who said on Sunday that the withdrawal from Gaza marks the start of an independent Palestinian state, will have trouble making this statement come true without cooperation from Israel, which expects the terrorist organizations to be destroyed, illegal weapons to be collected and for a unified Palestinian force to have sole security responsibility."

## IV. "Sharon Speaks"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (August 16): "The echoes ... of Ehud Barak's logic behind the unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon were unmistakable [in Sharon's speech to the nation on Monday]. Sharon was saying that Israel had gone as far as it could militarily under the existing rules of the game, so the only way Israel could advance further was to change those rules.... Though called unilateral, disengagement is thus really an unwritten, unsigned agreement with the international community. The agreement says: if we hand over territory fully to a Palestinian government, you will hold that government diplomatically and economically responsible, and we will hold it militarily responsible, if it refuses to eliminate terrorism from its realm.... When Sharon said that responses to further attacks would be 'more severe

than ever,' he was signaling that he intends to begin acting according to the new rules. The international community's job will be to do its best to ensure he does not have to, by imposing new levels of diplomatic and economic pressure on the Palestinians that, together with Israeli deterrence, force dramatic changes in their behavior. It will take the concerted effort of Israel and the international community, then, to ensure that the Israeli pain and sacrifice we are seeing today are not for naught and that Palestinian celebrations are not harbingers of a new round of belligerency."

#### 1V. "Inform Rice"

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized (August 16): "U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, according to reports, is expected to arrive in the region to offer her support and to encourage Prime Minister Ariel Sharon while he executes the decree of expulsion. It is very important to offer Ms. Rice a modest gift, a file with all the English-language newspaper clippings about Israel's situation on the eve of the Six-Day-War. Ms. Rice was a little girl back then and she, like the younger generation in Israel, is completely unaware of the atmosphere of terror that reigned in those weeks, when all the Arab countries joined forces to annihilate the state of Israel.... We did not initiate that war. It was forced on Israel, and to evacuate the Gaza Strip now is to reward the aggressor. The withdrawal is also a public admission of surrender to terrorism.... Sharon is a transient phenomenon, just like Bush and Ms. Rice, but we will remain here with the awful precedent set by the Sharon government.... Sharon is teaching the world that Jews can be exiled and beaten, and this will manifest itself in the activity of all those anti-Semitic organizations across the globe. Sharon took a step that no one pressured him to take. The road map was the plan, but he chose to embellish it and to precede it with the expulsion of the Jews from Gush Katif. There can be no doubt: this warrior hero has erased his past with a single stroke and will be recorded in all his notoriety in the history of the Jewish people."

#### VI. " Hamas's Hangover"

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in Jerusalem Post (August 16): "After first treating Israel's withdrawal as a trick, Palestinians are now celebrating it as a great victory. But after the partying ends even the anti-alcohol Hamas is going to have a big hangover... The main problem is not that the radicals, who enjoy about 80 percent support, will take over, rather that they will easily block diplomatic progress and maintain the terror war against Israel, damaging their own people more than their enemy. The radicals will also continue to use incitement to foment such hatred among young people as to ensure the conflict continues many years, thus blocking the creation of a Palestinian state. They will preserve anarchy, thereby preventing any improvement in Gazan living standards or the proper use of aid money. They will stop Abbas from consolidating an effective government. And they will persuade the world that the Palestinians don't want, or at least are unready, for peace. There is an expression for this kind of situation, and it is not 'great victory,' rather 'from the frying pan into the fire.'"

#### 12. Iraq:

##### Summary: -----

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "It appears that the political process being conducted in Iraq around the constitution is taking place in a bubble that is detached from reality -- in a country where dozens of people get killed every day."

##### Block Quotes: -----

"The Constitution Is Far Removed From Reality"

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (August 16): "The [Iraqi] draft constitution offers the Kurdish minority some ... concessions that are not all agreed upon. Despite the demand by the Shi'ite religious leadership that Islamic law be 'the basic source' of legislation, the draft stipulates that Islamic law will only be 'a

basic source.' The omission of the article 'the' from the text signifies a significant and far-reaching concession, not only to the Shi'ites' secular faction, and of the Kurds who were opposed to a religious formulation altogether -- it will also strengthen the status of women. On the other hand, the draft constitution is still rather unclear regarding the powers of the central government.... Participation of the Sunnis in decision-making [which the constitution drafters are opposed to] could assist in the continuation of negotiations against terrorist organizations and, more importantly, would give the Sunnis a power of veto regarding the adoption of the constitution through a referendum. Meanwhile, it appears that the political process being conducted in Iraq around the constitution is taking place in a bubble that is detached from reality -- in a country where dozens of people get killed every day."

KURTZER